If you don’t feel ready, discuss the reasons with your health care provider who can give you accurate information and help address your concerns. It is important that you think about the following things:

- How many times a day must treatment be taken?
- How often should treatment be taken (every 12 hours, every 24 hours)?
- How many pills per dose are needed?
- Does it matter if they are taken with food or on an empty stomach?
- What are the side effects?
- Are there other drugs they cannot be taken with?
- Do they require refrigeration or other special handling?
- Do you have a medical condition that may make certain drugs unsuitable for you?
- Do you have other chronic conditions eg diabetes, that you take medication for routinely? You may want to discuss how to combine this with your ARV treatment.

It is a good idea to write down the answers to the questions listed above for each drug in your regimen. Then come up with a schedule for taking the drugs with times, number of pills, and any food requirements. Go over this with your health care provider to make sure everything is right.

Some drugs work best if they are taken with or without certain foods. Ask your health care worker about each of the drugs you must take. If one or more of your drugs needs to be taken with food,
find out if that means a full meal or if a snack will do. Some drugs can be taken with food, but not high-fat foods. Plan ahead so that the times you take your drugs fit in with your eating habits and correct food requirements.

It is also important to find out what to do if you miss a dose. This happens to everyone from time to time. When it does, follow your health care provider’s instructions and then get right back on track with better adherence.

Side effects are an important factor when talking about HIV drugs. While all of the HIV drugs can cause side effects, not everyone will experience them. It is a good idea to find out what side effects to expect before you start your drugs. Then ask your health care worker how to manage minor side effects if they arise. Being mentally prepared can make side effects easier to manage if they occur. Most side effects improve in a few weeks.

Practical tips to improve adherence

- Believe that the medications will help you fight the virus and stay well. If you don’t think so, you won’t bother taking your pills correctly.
- Make taking your pills everyday at the same time part of your daily routine.
- Try to link taking your tablet to something you do daily like brushing your teeth or a specific television or radio show.
- Use a pill box, diary, cell phone reminder, or alarm to help you remember to take your medication.
- Plan ahead so that you don’t run out of medication.
- Get a treatment supporter to assist you or remind you.
- Telling others who are supportive can also help – it is sometimes difficult to take the drugs when you are keeping your HIV-positive status a secret.

Starting ARV treatment early and staying on treatment improves your chances of living a long and healthy life.

For more information: www.hivsa.com

If you do experience a side effect, don’t just stop taking your pills. Follow the recommendations given by your health care provider. If the problem does not improve seek advice from your clinic.

This pamphlet is funded with support from the US President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) program via the US Agency for International Development under Cooperative Agreement No. AID-674-A-12-00015 through Anova Health Institute.

The views expressed in this pamphlet do not necessarily reflect those of PEPFAR, USAID or AHI.

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